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ABSTRACT

An educational program offering Adult Basic Education, General Educational Development test preparation, and the Associate of Applied Science degree was made available at a federal minimum security prison with approximately 350 inmates. The majority of these prisoners were high school dropouts with an average educational level of ninth grade. Students were selected on the basis of standardized testing and interviews and were assigned to classes of 15 students each for self-paced and individualized instruction. A study was then made comparing 28 of these students to an equal number of nearby technical institute students. Results indicated no significant difference in reading comprehension between the groups, which suggests that the prison program was effective. (DF)

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LEARNING ASSISTANCE FOR INMATES IN A FEDERAL CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION*

Donna Wood

The magnitude of the need for correctional education is overwhelming in view of the fact that between 20 and 50 percent of the half-million adults incarcerated in American federal and state prisons cannot read or write. In many institutions, approximately 50 percent of those over 18 years of age have an eighth grade education and in some facilities for youthful offenders, as many as 80 percent are illiterate (4).

The problems of correctional education are further compounded when one considers that the goals of corrections and education are not always compatible. The primary goal of corrections is custody and management of those incarcerated while the essential goals of education include growth, freedom and self-actualization (4).

This paper describes an educational program at the Federal Correctional Institute at Memphis, Tennessee.

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DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAMS

During the summer and fall quarters of 1977, the State Technical Institute at Memphis (STIM) entered a contract to provide a variety of educational programs at the nearby Federal Correctional Institution (FCI). This facility, considered a minimum security prison, had been completed in the spring of 1977 and had an inmate population of about three hundred and fifty. Three principal types of programs were offered under the contractual agreement: ABE, GED preparation, and courses leading to an Associate of Applied Science Degree from STIM. Classes were held in an Education Building within the prison complex. Students at FCI-Memphis are typical of inmates in most federal and state Correctional institutions; that is, over half are school dropouts and have an average educational level of ninth grade.

Inmates interested in participating in the educational program were interviewed by personnel in the Education Department at the prison. Selection of inmates for the ABE and GED classes was based on Stanford Achievement Test scores, the Revised Beta Intelligence Test, and the personal interview. Depending on his work schedule, each student was assigned to a morning, afternoon, or night class.

Within the quidelines of the Federal Bureau of Prisons' Policy Statement on Education, the ABE and GED classes were designed as self-paced and individualized with the class size limited to fifteen students. Aides, inmates with some college background assigned to work in the program, set up audio-visual equipment and served as tutors. This invaluable assistance allowed the instructors to devote more time to special needs of individual students.

A core worktext series was used for each grade level of ABE along with suitable materials selected from a vast array of supplementary programs. Available for use were audio-cassette tapes with corresponding workbooks, boxed materials for mathematics, reading and study skills, anthologies, paperback books, and video tapes.

More specific diagnoses of GED students' strengths and weaknesses were determined by the General Education Performance Index (GEPI), Form A. This index provided information on the student's competency level for each of the subtests on the GED test. Instruction was then geared for the deficient areas; in most cases, English and mathematics. When the student and instructor determined that the student was ready to take the GED test, the GEPI, Form B was administered. If the student demonstrated an adequate performance level, he was permitted to take the GED test on the next scheduled testing date.

Flexibility in all aspects of the program was imperative to accommodate inmates' preferred learning modalities as well as their work schedules, medical appointments, and visitations.

Students in the Associate of Applied Science Degree program were enrolled in a four-hour self-paced course. Two texts were used: Reading Faster and Understanding More by Wanda Miller, and The Now Student by Edward Spargo. The Nelson-Denny Reading Test, Form D was administered as a pretest to determine reading strengths and weaknesses. Form C was used at the end of the quarter to determine gains.

The following comparisons were made between a group of students at the Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) and a group of students from the State Technical Institute (STIM). The total number of subjects was 56. The average age of the FCI student was 27 compared to an average age of 21 for the STIM student. Students from both Institutions held

jobs at least half-time and all students in these classes were high school graduates. Among the FCI subjects, there were 14 black and 14 white students. Sixteen black and 12 white students made up the STIM group.

The Nelson Denny Pretest and Posttest mean scores are reported in Table I. The pretest vocabulary mean score for FCI students was 30 compared to a mean score of 16 for STIM students. With the alpha level set at .05, these scores were subjected to an analysis of variance. The F ratio proved to be significant. (Table II)

Comprehension pretest scores indicated a mean score of 35 for FCI students and 27 for STIM students. The analysis of variance for the comprehension pretest showed a significant difference in favor of the FCI students' performance. (Table III)

The Nelson-Denny Posttest scores indicated a slight improvement in performance for both groups. The mean vocabulary score for the FCI students rose to 37 and the mean vocabulary score for STIM students rose to 19. The analysis of variance indicated a significant difference between the two groups of students still apparent in vocabulary performance. (Table IV)

However, mean scores for the Comprehension Posttest were 37 for FCI students and 32 for STIM students. The analysis of variance revealed that the performance levels of the comprehension posttest did not differ significantly. (Table V)

The correlations between age and the vocabulary and comprehension scores (both pretest and posttest) were so small that age could not be considered a significant determining factor in the scores of the dependent variables. (Table VI)

Table I

Nelson-Denny Reading Test Scores

		Pretest		Posttest	
Vocabulary	N	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
FCI	28	29.571	21.155	37.000	23.112
STIM	28	15.536	8.452	19.010	6.713
Comprehension					
FCI	28	34.500	14.305	36.857	12.406
STIM	28	26.714	10.201	31.643	9.318

Table II

Vocabulary Pretest

Source	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F	Probability of F
Between Groups	2758.018	1	2758.018	10.629	.002*
Within Groups	14011.82	54	259.4782		
Total	16769.84	55			

Table III

Comprehension Pretest

Source	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F	Probability of F
Between Groups	848.6428	1	848.6428	5.498	.023*
Within Groups	8334.714	54	154.3466		
Total	9183.357	55			

Table IV

Vocabulary Posttest

Source	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F	Probability of F
Between Groups	4736.160	1	4736.160	16.359	.001*
Within Groups	15638.68	54	289.6052		
Total	20374.84	55			

Table V

Comprehension Posttest

Source	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F	Probability of F
Between Groups	380.6428	1	380.6428	3.162	.081
Within Groups	6499.857	54	120.3677		
Total	6880.500	55			

Table VI

Correlation Matrix-Pearson Product-Moment Coefficients

	Age	Vocabulary (Pre)	Comprehension (Pre)	Vocabulary (Post)	Comprehension (Post)
Age	1	.09	.04	.09	-.07
Vocabulary (Pre)	--	1	.68*	.83*	.72*
Comprehension (Pre)	--	--	1	.61*	.78*
Vocabulary (Post)	--	--	--	1	.74*
Comprehension (Post)	--	--	--	--	1

*Correlations significant beyond the 0.05 level

CONCLUSION

Glaser (2) and Alper (1) have both reported evidence of a favorable impact from correctional education. However, Glaser cited four major needs of correctional education: (a) to challenge students who have been frustrated or bored with previous schooling; (b) to change the social relationships usually associated with schooling; (c) to remain honest in reporting educational achievements of inmates; and (d) to conduct research. (2)

Marsh has indicated that correctional education needs professional status: personnel certification, accreditation by regional agencies, and teacher education programs on correctional education. Moreover, he stated that the achievement of professional status with all its implications is the resource with the greatest potential for a major breakthrough in penal institutions. (3) This is a challenge to reading specialists to become concerned and involved in correctional education.

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